

## 38. CATERPILLAR IN DIET OF HOUSE GECKO

The food of the House Gecko *Hemidactylus flaviviridis* consists mainly of insects. Smaller insects are swallowed whole, whereas larger victims are battered to death and then eaten (THE BOOK OF INDIAN REPTILES, J.C. Daniel, p. 36). The gecko has been observed catching moths, butterflies and a variety of insects.

In the evening of 15 February 1988 a gecko was

hunting insects on a wall adjacent to a bed of chrysanthemum flowers, when it noticed a black caterpillar with yellow spots on one of the plants very close to the wall. Without much difficulty it caught the caterpillar and swallowed it. This is the first such instance noticed by me.

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39. REDISCOVERY OF HOLOTYPE OF *TROPIDONOTUS STRIOLATUS*  
BLYTH, 1868 (SERPENTES: COLUBRIDAE) IN THE COLLECTION OF THE  
ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

(With a plate)

*Tropidonotus striolatus* was described by Blyth (1868), based on a single well-preserved specimen of colubrid snake from the Andaman Islands, collected by Capt. Col. R.C. Tytler. Although currently considered a synonym of *Xenochrophis piscator* (Schneider 1799), Theobald (1868) in his "Catalogue of the Reptiles in the Museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal" considered the species as distinct and gave a detailed description of the species. Later Theobald (1876 : 175—176), in his "Descriptive Catalogue of the Reptiles of British India" again supported the separate status of the species based on this type.

Smith (1943), who examined the entire collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, prior to this publication, called attention to the fact that the type of *Tropidonotus striolatus* later synonymised with *Xenochrophis piscator* was lost. The purpose of this communication is to announce the rediscovery of the holotype of *Tropidonotus striolatus* Blyth in the collection of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta.

The holotype was originally deposited in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (A.S.B. 46 a), which became a part of the collections of the Indian Museum (Calcutta) in 1880 as I.M. 7402. The zoological accessions in the Natural History section of the Indian Museum were then transferred to the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, in July 1916. The holotype is an adult male from the Andaman Islands which was catalogued in volume II of the Register of Presentations to the Indian Museum on 20 August 1880 with the registration No. 7402 (A.S.B. 46 a). The standing of this specimen as the type of *Tropidonotus striolatus* must now be examined. The evidence concerning the type status of the specimen is as follows:

i) The registration register and the label afford the

biomen *Tropidonotus striolatus*, and the accession to the Indian Museum collection of the specimen on 20 August 1880, is consistent with the date on which the species was described (1868).

ii) There is a specific entry 'Type' in the registration register against the accession number.

iii) The holotype agrees well with Blyth's original description of the species, and the data on the label and the registration number are consistent.

iv) Further evidence of critical number is provided by the following statements in the Annual Report for 1910—11 of the Indian Museum (Annandale 1911):

"The following 'Type' specimens of new genera and species, subspecies and varieties have been added to the collection of the Indian Museum during the year:

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*Tropidonotus piscator* type of *Tropidonotus striolatus* Blyth.

This type was deposited in the Indian Museum in the spirit of the resolution adopted at a Conference as regards Museums in India, held in Calcutta during December 1907, 'that all zoological types in India shall be deposited in the Indian Museum' (Anonymous 1908)"

In view of Smith's categorical statement that the type of *Tropidonotus striolatus* Blyth was lost, it was considered necessary to draw the attention of herpetologists to the continued existence of the type.

The holotype of *Tropidonotus striolatus*, presently known as *Xenochrophis piscator* (Schneider) from the Andaman Islands, was described as having 19 rows of keeled scales, 141 ventrals, 85 subcaudals, one pre— and 3 or 4 postoculars, 9 supralabials, one large and square loreal; the anal is divided. The specimen (ZSIC 7402) in